



Committee on **HOMELAND SECURITY** Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

September 12, 2012

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Statement of Chairman Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

"Resilient Communications: Current Challenges and Future Advancements"

**September 12, 2012
Remarks as Prepared**

Yesterday marked the 11th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. Among the many important recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission was the need for operable and interoperable communications.

Much progress has been made in the realm of communications since September 11th and Hurricane Katrina. Federal, state, and local entities have worked to enhance their communications capabilities. The Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications has been working with States and localities to accomplish the goals in the National Emergency Communications Plan.

At long last, the D-Block has been allocated to public safety. Members were recently appointed to the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet. FirstNet, working with Federal, state, local, and tribal partners, will work to develop, build, and operate the nationwide interoperable wireless broadband

network. I am interested in hearing from all our witnesses about their thoughts on the development and operation of the network.

To ensure and enhance the continuity of communications at the Federal level, earlier this summer President Obama signed Executive Order 13618, "Assignment of National Security and Emergency Communications Functions." This executive order requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to serve as Co-Chair of the Executive Committee established by the executive order. The Secretary must also establish a Joint Program Office in support of the Executive Committee.

This Subcommittee has been aware of plans within the Department to reorganize the communications functions within the National Protection and Programs Directorate, although requests for details on the structure of such a reorganization have gone unanswered. Ms. Stempfley, I am particularly interested in hearing about the executive order's impact on the communications offices in NPPD. We must ensure that any reorganization, or consolidation, of offices does not impair the ability of OEC and NCS to achieve their vital missions or erode any of the advancements in our communications capabilities made to date.

While we acknowledge the progress we have made in these areas, we must also acknowledge that more work remains. We need only look at the impact of the derecho earlier this summer on 9-1-1 call centers in Virginia.

I am aware that there have been a number of reviews of what happened as a result of the storm. I hope our witnesses will discuss their findings and we can work together to use these lessons learned to enhance the system in the future.

I am also interested in hearing about future capabilities that next generation 9-1-1 will be able to offer our emergency response providers and the public they so ably serve.

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